I am no Gabriel

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I am no Gabriel

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Summary

Hannibal arrive ls at Will's home with an offer to cook for him, only to find Will in the middle of doggy bath day. And because Hannibal doesn't know how to leave Will alone, he throws himself into the thick of it.

"Sounds like we have our work cut out for us. We better get started."

"Yeah we- Wait, we?"

And by the end, their relationship changes forever.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The halls of Quantico's FBI Academy are mostly empty, as Hannibal walks his familiar route. The fluorescent lights above him hum softly with electricity as he passes under them. Only a few students dart by, their hurried pace indicating their tartiness. He hopes their teachers enact demerits for they're transgressions.

He pays them no more mind, and instead finds the lecture hall he is looking for. The room is dark when he slips inside, only the flood of light from the overhead projector illuminates the small space.

A photo of a young woman, glossy eyes and empty stare heaven bound. Her pale gray corpse nestled in a bed of fall leaves. Her shirt torn open, breasts exposed. A deep gash across her throat revealing severed muscles, skin stained with days old blood.

"Amelia Baker was found on the edge of the woods in rural Iowa, just outside Mount Vernon." Will Graham's voice rings within the otherwise silent room. He leans against the edge of his desk, head bowed, eyes focused on the microfiber handkerchief between his thumb and index finger as he rubs the lense of his glasses.

The gesture is meant to appear casual, and perhaps it would be, if not for the length at which Will performs the action, as he relays detailing of the crime scene in question.

"Her throat was cut from left to right, meaning our killer is right handed. The wound impression suggests the blade was angled, with a short hilt, creating a rounded bruising pattern at the initial entry site. While her blouse was torn open, there is no evidence of sexual assault, and no foreign body fluids found. Time of death was between 7-9pm Friday, her body would be found on a Monday morning." Will turns his glasses into the light, checking for fingerprints he knows aren't there, before placing them back on the bridge of his nose.

"This crime scene marks the second in a string of four. One dating back five years ago, Meghan Wolf, 2009," the slide clicks, showing a woman in her late twenties, throat cut, breasts exposed. "Rebcca Childs, found four months after Amelia, and last but not least," The projector cuts to another woman, displaying the same grisly death, "Connie Frisk. All women disappearing on Friday evenings, found the following Monday."

These crime scenes mean nothing to Hannibal, for they are not his work. Still, he takes in the information, complying it for later. Will might be less than talkative in their next session, and having a means to draw himself into the case will give him reason to spend more time in his presence. Something he has found himself doing with more and more frequency.

His presence here is no different.

Just short of an hour ago, Hannibal had arrived here to return a book he'd borrowed from Alana. Coming all the way to Quantico's FBI Academy hadn't been necessary, he would have seen her later that week anyways. But it has been an excuse to stop by and sneak into Will's lecture hall.

It was a joy to watch him when he was unaware of his presence. Seeing him pace aimlessly about the small raised stage, his gait slow and measured as he recanted details of the current topic in the overhead projector.

His head always tilted just so, gaze hanging at the level of his students necks. He gets close sometimes, when a student raises their hand. He addresses them politely, allowing them to ask their questions, eyes aimed at mouths, an ear, a dimple. Hannibal has made a passionate study of Will's micro expressions, thus he can tell when Will is disappointed in their unimagined questions.

"Why did our killer wait five years between the first and second victim? What was so special about his first and what about his second victim made the pattern begin again?"

The lights come up, signaling the end of class.

"I want a four page paper on Thursday detailing your theories. Details, people. I want to see some creativity this time." When Will finishes speaking, he gives them his back as dismissal.

The students shuffle to their feet, and start packing up their things. Very few approach him afterwards, and those that do are quick to ask clarifying questions and leave.

Hannibal makes himself known as the students start to file out. He emerges from his hidden place in the doorway, hanging back, waiting a respectable distance to allow the few students left to get what they need. He knows precisely when Will spots him in his peripheral vision.

Will's jaw angles up, giving Hannibal a lovely view of his throat as he looks past the faces of his students and meets his eyes.

For just a moment, they are caught in each other's gaze. Will doesn't like eye contact, but he seems, as of late, made an exception for Hannibal. It warms him to think he had this privilege.

Hannibal pulls out a smile, and shifts his body into a relaxed stance. *Take your time.*

Will gives a curt nod and his eyes fall away. He returns to his students, eyes deliberately aimed at elbows.

Hannibal hasn't missed the curious look of the remaining students. They eye one another, then him. He can see their minds working.

When the small crowd disperses, he goes to Will.

"Doctor Lecter. What can I help you with?"

"Just stopping by to say hello. I was in the neighborhood." Never mind the reason he came at all was to spy on him for his own pleasure.

"Hmm." Well grunts, turning to pack up his bag.

Hannibal can see a few students lingering in the doorway and the soft murmur of conventions.

Who is that?

Did you see? He actually looked at him.

Do they work together?

Hannibal resists the urge to smirk.

Will has a reputation for being anti-social and unapproachable. He doesn't divulge personal truths about himself to them and they know next to nothing about him. These students have been studying with him for almost a whole year now, and are likely starved for any information.

Let's give them something to gossip about.

"Also, I was going to ask you if you were free for dinner. At my home, tonight."

Will almost drops his bag. "W-what?"

Oh my God! Did you hear that?

Did he just ask him out ?

"Dinner. With me." Hannibal repeats, just to hear the way it sounds again.

"Uh I.." Will shoves his glasses up the bridge of his nose. He can't bring himself to meet his eyes when he rejects him. "I'm busy."

He expected as much. Still, a pang of disappointment lingers. "A previous engagement? Does Jack have a new case for you?"

"N-no."

A curl of jealousy pools in Hannibal's gut. He keeps his voice light, schools an open smile on his face when he asks, "A date perhaps?"

Will sputters. "No, n-nothing like that. I've just got some work to do at home. I'd invite you to my place but…" Will shrugs his book bag over his shoulder, body curled around himself. "Look, I gotta go. The dogs…"

"I understand." he doesn't, but it's what he is supposed to say in this situation. "Maybe next time?"

"Um. Yeah. Maybe." Will says, walking backwards towards the door. "I'll uh, see you later."

Hannibal nods, sad to see him go. "Until next time, Will."

Normally, Hannibal doesn't spend too much time worrying about what wasn't meant to be. He allows time for formulas, searching the algorithms to see what might have been. These are reserved for moments of great importance that he fancies to change.

Insignificant blurs in time do not make or break a man. There are plenty more avenues to lead Will to his table once again. Hannibal has a time-tested patience for playing the long game.

Something feels different today. He keeps replaying the conversation in his mind, trying to tilt the moment on its axis, examine it from every angle. Perhaps see where body language, or the inflection of his voice could have changed the outcome.

The whole drive home he mulls it over. Even a good book and a glass of Merlot, with its boisterous black cherry flavor, supple tannins, and chocolatey finish was not enough to fully draw his attention. He keeps cycling back to the same two thoughts.

Will said he would be home tonight. Will says he'd invite him over but… Will said he would be home tonight.

Maybe that is what causes the following sequence of events that would ultimately change his life forever. Hannibal puts down his book, abandoning his unfinished wine glass where it rests and moves to the kitchen.

He opens the fridge, eyes falling to the neatly organized allotment of tonight's dinner ingredients. Hannibal drums his fingers against the door handle once, twice.

He is about to do something reckless and frankly, rude. He packs up a cooler with everything he thinks he will need, and drives to Wolf Trap.

He thrives on careful planning and measured articulation to construct the cause and effect around him. Will is unpredictable, and so is the way he makes Hannibal feel.

Elation, trepidation. Desire.

He isn't so reckless that he would bring human meat to the doorstep of the most brilliant profiler this world has likely ever seen. The meat has been substituted for tonight, chicken thighs instead of the tender cut from an inconsiderate barber who had butchered his hair eight months ago. While there will be no joyful sight of Will dining on the rude, there can be no evidence of trickery to be found later.

Substitutions made, he dresses down, choosing an off-white button up, tan vest with a matching pant. A dark blue tie. He selects his plainest brown overcoat, the one with the

double breast buttons. It's casual to his usual affair. This is done for Will's benefit, hoping to make the man more at ease with his sudden intrusion.

In the car, he turns the station to the classic radio, letting the instrumental compositions from Chopin keep his pulse in check.

Will said would be home. Will said he would have invited him but… Hannibal wants to know what he meant by *but*.

He arrives just after four pm, late enough that the man could have settled at home, but too soon for him to have started dinner.

The yard is empty besides Will's silver Volvo. Home, just like he said he would be. Excitement swells in his chest as he climbs the stairs, cooler in hand, and rings the bell.

Hannibal hears the telltale pack of dogs howling in unison, further announcing his presence. He finds he does not need to fake a smile, a curious bubble of adrenaline that makes his heart rate double. The dogs crowd behind the door, scratching and whining, oddly quieter than usual. He didn't have time to discern why before Will's calm but firm voice appears to reel in their excitement.

When the door opens, a mess of satiny brown curls appear first as his head appears around the frame of the door.

"D-Doctor Lecter?" Will stammers, opening the door just enough to allow one shoulder through. "What are you doing here?"

"You said you would be at home today, when you declined to come to mine for dinner. I thought I might bring dinner to you." Hannibal gestures to the cooler in his hands.

"Oh. Uh…" the door jerks, and Will stumbles briefly before rights himself. "That's really thoughtful of you but I'm kinda uh, in the middle of something."

"It's no trouble-" Hannibal starts.

The door jerks again.

"Hey, stop it." Will sushes, clearly distracted by his pack. Normally they are very well behaved, eager to please their master. Something must be different today.

"Sorry," Will says, turning his attention back to Hannibal, his leg working to push one of his dogs away from the door. "I just got out of the bath with -"

A wet nose appears between Will and the door frame, quickly followed by the rest of the dog's head.

Will wedges his body against the door, trying to keep the mutt contained. "Jack, Stop it!" Jack does not listen, just keeps trying to wiggle his way past.

The next actions happen in quick succession.

Will nearly trips as Jack wedges his shoulder through, Will's weight thrown out of balance as he struggles to keep the hound inside. He nearly goes down, grabs for the dog as Jack's chest passes over the threshold. For a moment, Hannibal thinks he's caught him, but Jack's fur is damp and Will's hands slip. Will goes down face first, and the dog bolts from the house.

Before the hound can manage a break for the stairs, Hannibal catches him by the collar. Jack is one of the biggest dogs Will owns, but he is no match for Hannibal. The dog whimpers and throws his weight forward, but Hannibal doesn't relent.

His freedom gone, Jack gives a whine of a yawn and does a full body shake, sending a cascade of dirty bath water, hair, and slobber all over Hannibal’s face and clothing.

"Oh my God, Jack!" Will shouts, stumbling to his feet, obviously mortified. He grabs Jack from him, hauling him back towards the house. "I am so sorry! Jack, that was bad! Bad dog."

A handful of water beads drip off Hannibal's chin.

Will forces Jack inside, calling back to him. "Come inside and I'll um… Let me get you a towel or.. something."

Hannibal is stunned for a solid few breaths. Not quite what he had in mind. With a calming breath, he takes a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his face, and follows Will into the house.

Once inside, Hannibal shuts the door behind him to prevent another incident. Only a few members of the pack are present to greet him, sniffing his outstretched hands. He touches each one's head in turn, having to bend down low to reach the small one with the overbite.

The small Terrier looking one has a plastic cone around his neck, which flaps from side to side as he wiggles with excitement. Once it's clear he isn't baring treats they nose his cooler with interest.

"This is not for you." Only then do they back off.

Will, who had momentarily disappeared, comes back with a towel. "I was so sorry," he says again, immediately invading his space to try and dab whatever he can reach. "I didn't think he'd…"

Hannibal doesn't fight him, just lets Will fret over him for a few moments. Having the empath's hands on him is a treat he hasn't known he'd needed until this moment.

"This coat is probably expensive. I can pay to have it dry cleaned."

It was, and he will allow no such thing. It was hardly Will's fault, and it got him in the door.

"I am so… god this is embarrassing. He bolted from the bathtub when he heard the doorbell. I should have shut him in a room, or dried him off before I- I didn't know it was you

or I would have-" Will is rambling now, clearly Hannibal's silence has made him anxious.

"Will, it's alright." he says, hands catching Will's.

Will looks up, eyes frightful and wide. The corners of his red mouth are pulled down, pursuing his plush lips.

Hannibal has the distinct urge to kiss them. Instead he softens his expression, lowering his voice to sooth him. "Everything is fine. My clothes will be fine."

Will swallows, unsure if he believes him. When Hannibal doesn't yield, Will gives him a jerk of a nod. He pulls away, hands wrapping over his elbows as if to reassure himself. He folds inward, head tilting down to break eye contact.

Will is still giving off nervous energy, his cheeks turning a dusty pink. "Sorry for the um, state of my clothes."

It is then that Hannibal takes him in.

Will is usually covered in hair. Having seven (sometimes more) dogs, it would be impossible to avoid it. But today, Will is saturated in it. Much of the hair on his Grey sweatshorts is White, evidence of Jack. But Hannibal can pick out a few clumps of auburn, and some coarse hairs on the old white t-shirt he is wearing, the one with the hole in the shoulder seam.

He's also soaked.

"Some of the dogs found something dead to roll in on our walk this morning. I didn't have time before work to get them all cleaned up so I had to put them up in the laundry room until I was done with class this afternoon. I've still got a few baths left to do. I figured I'd brush them all out too. After that, I was going to do nail trims."

"What is this one wearing?" Hannibal asked, gesturing to the one cone on his head. "Has he hurt himself?"

"The cone of shame? Nah, not exactly. Buster has some allergy issues this year. He's been licking and chewing his legs raw so I had to do something before he makes it worse."

"You have a lot on your hands today, then." Hannibal says, amused. "A real doggy salon here today."

"Yeah." Will says, scratching the back of his head sheepishly. "S'why I said I was busy. The last time this happened, it took me maybe four hours to get everybody cleaned up. Between baths, brushing, blow dry, it's well… a lot."

"Sounds like we have our work cut out for us. We better get started."

"Yeah we- Wait, we?" the anxious expression returns.

"Yes. It will be much quicker work with two." Hannibal says, removing his coat and hanging it on the coat rack.

"Hold on," Will chases after him, hands up like he means to stop him. "No, I can't let you do that."

"Why not? Worried I'll dirty my clothes?" Hannibal gestures to himself, already hairy and wet from Jack's rebellious act.

"I can't ask you to help me.*

Hannibal is already rolling up his sleeves "And there is no need for you to, for I have already offered."

Will worries his lower lip with his teeth, searching for a new excuse. "It's going to take forever. I'm sure you have way more important things to do than this."

"I can assure you, I don't." Hannibal had already set this evening aside for Will the moment he had packed up his cooler and started his Bentley. "And then, after we are done, we can make dinner together. The food will taste all the better for having worked so hard."

Will's mouth works, trying to stutter out further argument.

Hannibal has better ways for him to use it. To distract himself from going down that road now, he places one finger over Will's lips, silencing any more protests.

Will squeaks, caught off guard by the gesture. He freezes, wide eyes blinking up at him. An expression crosses his face, but winks out a moment later when he catches himself. Fear? Excitement?

"Will, you have not guilted me into this, nor do I feel any obligation. I am here because I want to be. Have I made myself clear?"

A soft blush rises on Will's completion. A stuttered breath leaves him, and he nods.

Only then does Hannibal remove his finger from Will's soft and plush mouth. "Jack is finished. Who is our next patient?"

Will swallows, Adam's apple bobbing. "Max."

"Wonderful."

Chapter End Notes

I had this story in my drafts, and then hit the wrong button and accidentally posted it. I hadn't met to until I was finished with my other ongoing fic, but with the damage done, I'm going to leave it up.

Edit: Wow, for posting it accidentally, I finished much faster than I expected. I only have one chapter left, and it's 95% done. I hope to have it done this coming Tuesday.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> This got a lot more traction than I thought it would. Thank you to those that commented and/or kudo'd this accidental story post. I'm still working out the ending on this, but all the love you gave this got me inspired to get chapter two done. This update is for you ❤️

When Hannibal imagines all of the reasons he could have ended up on the floor of Will's living room, this certainly isn't one of them. He had expected dinner, conversation. Some subtle flirtation and, if he played his cards just right, a kiss before the night was over.

But here he is, a brush in his hand and a wiggly dog in his lap. Next to his crossed legs are small piles of shed fur he has already brushed out and pulled from the bristles. His clothes are nearly as furry as Will's now, and he has to put a sincere effort into ignoring the compulsion to rub the hairs away.

He resists now that Will has accepted his presence in his home, lest he become anxious and start giving Hannibal excuses to leave again. He wants Will to associate contentment with him nearby. To connect the wires within his mind that it is good for Hannibal to be here.

Perhaps later he can experiment, see if he can create a pavlovian response in Will to instantly calm at the very sight of him. Speaking of Will…..

Will isn't far away, trimming Buster's nails. His cone has been removed to make him more comfortable and confident, as he can see what Will is doing to him without it on. Will's dogs place a lot of trust in him, and it is endearing to witness his affection for them.

They worked out their schedule together; each dog would be washed, dried, then brushed out before the next dog would be brought out. Hannibal offered to brush while Will trims the previously clean dog's nails, talking Hannibal through what he is doing.

"You have to be careful of the Quick when cutting. It's easy to see the blood supply in the nail on a light colored nail." Will explains, showing Hannibal when he leans in to watch. Will positions the clippers at angle, several millimeters below the faint red wedge. With a swift chunk, the overgrown section is freed. "See? Nice and short."

Hannibal makes a thoughtful sounds. "This is very educational."

"It's more difficult when a dog has dark nails. In that situation, you can try taking a little at a time, or-"

Hannibal isn't as interested in this information as Will is in giving it. The fact the Quick grows as the nail does, or when trimming is neglected the can become overgrown make walking painful and can cause skeletal abnormalities in the future mean little to him. The only dogs he has regular interactions with are Will's, and there are no plans for that to change.

Will likely knows on some level that Hannibal doesn't need to know any of this information. He is a very perceptive man. Something seems to have overridden his mind this evening, because he can't seem to stop talking.

Hannibal listens anyways, delighted not in the material, but the passion Will has. These things are important to him, and sharing them with Hannibal means something.

Of Will's seven dogs, four had actively rolled in the deer carcass. Only Winton and Zoey had refrained, and Buster's cone had made partaking difficult. He had only managed a few wiggles before Will had called them back.

In the warmer months Will bathes the dogs outside on the deck. Now that it is late in the fall, the evening air holds a shivering chill, due drops frozen by the time the sun begins to rise.

With Jack out of the way, Max, the tri colored Border Collie, had been next. Hannibal's job had been to make sure the dog stayed in the tub, while Will worked the shampoo into fur. Max's long fur had taken the longest of all the dogs to properly brush out, then blow dry.

It hadn't helped that Max had been very insistent about receiving belly rubs and kept slowly turning over onto his back throughout the process. Hannibal had to reposition him, after several tummy scratches that had Max's leg whipping wildly when he found the right spot.

After Max was Buster, the Jack Russell Terrier, and finally Ellie, a Bichon Frisé mix. These two had fought the most during the bath, their small size gave them much more room to wiggle around the tub.

In between each bath, the cleaned pooch was taken downstairs for the brush and blow dry portion. Hannibal is surprised how well each dog handles the blow dryer, as it is loud, and coupled with the stream of warm air moving up and down their bodies could trigger an instinctive fear response.

"It's such a pain when they do this, rolling in something dead." Will says, changing the subject quite suddenly.

Hannibal looks up from his work, eyes finding Will's. Has some discomfort shown through? Is this another attempt to dissuade him from staying? "You would deny them their instincts?"

"When it's this inconvenient for me? Yes." he says.

"Instinct is innate, their instinctive behaviors and responses are present and complete within the individual at birth. Asking them to deny their instincts goes against their very nature." And you might have turned me away. I wouldn't be able to be here now, with you.

Will's expression changes, likely in response to something that must have slipped through in Hannibal's face. Another reminder of Will's ability to accurately discern thoughts and feelings.

An emotion is brewing in his mind, but Hannibal cannot pin it down before Will closes up on him.

He clips the last of Buster's nails and sets the small dog down on the wooden floor after reattaching his cone. Buster shakes his body, cone flapping comically before he runs off to find something else to do.

Will sits up on his knees, brushing at the tiny hairs clinging to his stomach and thighs. The action does little more than spread them about, with just a few clumps whisking up into the air.

Hannibal nearly comments on how little dogs shed the most, when Will drops down on his hands to crawl towards him.

His mouth dries up, stuck open around the words that have died on his tongue. Hannibal is not one to be caught unaware in a fantasy, but the vulgar image of Will, vulnerable on his knees in front of him, has him in a moment of free fall.

The two of them in Hannibal's bedroom, Will's bare back a lovely contrast to the midnight blue sheets. Hannibal's hands around the perfect globes of Will's buttocks, opening him up for the next thrust. He would position just so, head facing the end of the bed, allowing him to watch Will from both ends from the dressing mirror. Will's red mouth making debauched sounds of pleasure as Hannibal fucks him slow, wringing his lover until he has nothing left to give.

Only the iron-clad control he has on his body (that and the fact he hadn't seen Will from behind) stop him from having an uncontrollable erection.

A erotic image doesn't leave him even when Will comes to a stop, legs curling under him next to Ellie's side. His knee is just two inches from Hannibal's, and he has never been more aware of the distance between them.

"We don't really know why they do it. The rolling." Will says, picking up Ellie's back leg to start in her nails. "There is a theory that it dates back to their early days as wolves. Some think it could be to mask their scent while hunting. Another theory is that it may be to bring information back to the pack. Rolling in a decaying carcass, or even fresher meat, could be a way for wolves to tell members of the pack, 'look what I found.'"

Whatever Will is thinking, he doesn't want to share right now. Hannibal isn't going to push the subject; Will has a tendency to retreat when pushed too far in matters of his own emotions. Trying to draw him out before he is ready will likely have the opposite effect.

"There could also be a social aspect of scent rolling. A pack of wolves may all roll in the same scent, perhaps to create a sense of togetherness or group smell." Hannibal says, re-entering the conversation. "Many social animals exhibit behaviors to establish bonds with members of their pack."

"Everyone wants to feel like they belong." Will says, voice soft and reverent. "It's part of of biology."

"Like calls to like." He agrees. "It follows us through our evolution."

"Same as instincts."

"They are our first teachers, fine tuned to keep us alive. It is a long held theory that Instinct can be boiled down to four f's. fighting for territory, resources, and mates. Fleeing when we lose or are in danger. Feeding oneself and often their offspring, and fornicating."

Will's nostrils flare as he snorts. "Fornicating? That's not something I thought I'd ever hear you say."

"Would you prefer a different term?"

"I cant imagine you say 'fucking.'" Will chuckle, "You're a pretty proper gentleman."

"Alas, I am as much a slave to instinct as the rest of the world." Hannibal says, playing up the words with a woeful tone.

"Are we talking about animal or human instinct?" Will retorts.

"Are they really that different?"

Will shrugs, leaning into Hannibal’s space to clip Ellie's front paws. "Charles Darwin thought sympathy is our strongest instinct. Human capacity to care and cooperate is wired into particular regions of the brain and nervous system. One recent study found compelling evidence that many of us are genetically predisposed to be empathetic."

Hannibal doesn't react to Will's increased closeness, simply helps roll her onto her side, holding her remaining paw still for him. "That would make you the epitome of evolution."

"Hah! Hardly." Will laughter comes out in one huff of air. "It's a curse, really, to feel this much. Never knowing where my own feelings begin and someone else's end."

"I don't see it that way." Hannibal says, fingers brushing the edge of Will's knee. "There are those of us who long to be understood, and be fully known. You have an ability to connect in a way others can't."

"Burdened with it. Connectivity. Always reaching out into the darkness. Never alone in my thoughts, yet always lonely." Will says with a sigh, a sad resigned smile on his face.

"Then you need someone who will reach across the void to meet you there."

Will's smile falters, eyes flickering down to Hannibal's fingers still lingering on his knee. His mouth tightens as he turns his face away, suddenly shy. "Why did you come here tonight?"

Why indeed. Hannibal is silent for a moment. He thinks about the strange way Will makes him feel. How his attention might as well be food to his aching belly. His inability to fight or flee from his desire to seek him out, despite how dangerous Will is for him. The potential to be known by him, in all ways possible.

"Instinct, I suppose."

Will is the one to be quiet now, ducking his head to avoid Hannibal’s gaze, pretending to appraise Ellie's nails one more time. "We're making good time. Harley is the last one."

Chapter Three

For the last time tonight, Hannibal takes his place in Will's bathroom. His knees have begun to ache from kneeling for these sessions. The cheap turquoise rug does little to cushion the sting away. In fact, the woven fabric only seems to make matters worse.

He ignores it all, placing the pain and discomfort in a box on the back of his mind. He imagines shutting the lid tight, turning the key in the brass lock. It's a method he learned long ago, life had not been kind to him.

With that or if the way, he can concentrate on soothing Harley as Will washes the suds from her fur.

The bathroom is small and they have to cram together. Even with Will between him, Hannibal could touch the toilet if he extends his arm. An uncomfortable situation, but he makes due. For Will, he might just do anything to please him.

Harley is a fairly large creature, reddish brown fur with a soft white patch underneath. And while Jack is taller by at least half a foot, Harley must outweigh him by twenty pounds. She has a very wide head, large paws and is built like a tank. She's an intimidating looking beast.

Despite her size, she is patient. Harley has been very tolerant, more so than Jack had been, Will tells him. "It's the pit bull in her."

Still, most dogs are wary of water in this way and it brings out the evolutionary need for escape. Occasionally, she still tries to climb out, carefully trying to wiggle her way under Hannibal’s arm and over Will's leg. When Hannibal didn't have a good position to redirect her, Will pulls her to him as he coos to her, telling her she's such a good girl, they are almost done. He doesn't react to the wetness of her fur as it soaks into his shirt.

Hannibal’s sleeves are thoroughly damp by this point, the water strikingly cold against his warm skin. The outer layer of his vest is splattered with water droplets, a patchwork of dark brown speckles against the tan surface.

Will is perched on the edge of the tub, his feet in the murky water. His shirt bears wet head prints from Harley, his sweat shorts puddled from the water that drips from his chin. From his position on the floor, Hannibal can see a ghost of the nodes of his spine as he's hunched forward. A fringe of his curls frame his face as his head tilted downward, concentrating fully on his work, rinsing until the water runs clear off Hadley's back.

With his brilliant blue eyes downcast, Hannibal can be free with his appraisal.

It is a favorite pastime of his, watching Will while the man is seemingly unaware. Just like this morning, hidden away in the comfortable darkness of Will's classroom.

Hannibal has taken mental pictures over the course of their evening, saved the images in his Mind Palace for later. Will laying on his stomach, cutting the nails of a particularly stubborn pooch. Him on his knees,spine a sultry curl. Right now, his soft eyes and easy smile. Hannibal wants that smile to be for him.

The moments that do not sate him enough to be simply revisiting will likely be recorded later in his sketchbook.

He might have to draw him like he is now. This is the relaxed he had ever seen him. Will is practiced at restraint, holding tight to his own reigns. This whole evening has shown the ever present scowl can lift from his face, and the hard look about his eyes can soften.

Hannibal is sure no one else has seen this side of Will. His students get the demanding professor, harsh in his critique. Jack gets the unstable imaginative profiler, a man who fears his own ability to compartmentalize the numbers that live in his head.

Hannibal gets moments like these. He didn't use to. Will had been quite bristlely to him when they first met. It has taken a lot of trial and error to find the right balance of vulnerability and invasion to get him to open up. His efforts have afforded him this privilege to be here, in his presence. Hannibal might have done it even without the guise of council or therapy, just be able to look at him.

Will has an objective beauty to him. He has great proportions, and his facial features are a near perfect rendition of the golden ratio, the epitome of mathematical perfection. His dark and wild hair, paired with his bright and vibrant eyes give him an almost ethereal allure. And now, paired with this peaceful expression…

The great masters of old would have found him the perfect subject to immortalize in stone or marble. Surely they would have posed him, naked but for a circlet of lavender, etching his likeness in God's image.

Modern puritans would find this display of marble far too titillating, perhaps even scandalous in the erotica reactions to those who looked upon this Demigod of Beauty. Hannibal would count himself among them, falling before those perfect feet in acts of worship.

The things he would do for this man…

The mental topic is a dangerous route to take at the moment. If he isn't careful, he might slip up, and let too much through and scare Will off him.

"Why Jack?" Hannibal asks, trying to escape the spiral.

"Huh?"

"Your dog." He clarifies, "Did you name him?"

"Oh. Uh, yeah."

"After Crawford?"

Will shrugs. "Jack gets laser forced. When he sets his mind to something, he does not stop until he gets it."

"That is very Crawford."

Will laughs, so free and open that Hannibal is helpless not to answer with his own. Will's face pinched in joy is lovely, from the sharp pull of his lips that show pearly teeth, to the squint of his eyes.

When the laughter dies off, Hannibal is sad to see that expression go.

"Do you name all your dogs?"

"Pretty much. I usually find them without collars. People don't want them to be found in a way they can be returned."

"I see…" While Hannibal has never felt the need for a pet in his life, he is irate at the notion of their neglect. Cruelty towards domesticated animals that possess a limited ability to care for themselves vexes him in a similar way as habitat destruction for wildlife does. He has killed more than a few local politicians who have voted to defund wildlife sanctuaries.

Hadley whines again, pulling him out of his musings as she tries a new avenue of escape. She turns his way, her forelimbs mounting the lip of the tub. Hannibal brackets Hadley with his forearms, applying careful pressure to keep her where she is.

The rolled edges of his sleeves dampen, and he gives considerable effort to ignore it. He tries to mimic the sound Will had made before, rumbles soft praises, petting down her chest. He feels the pucker of her skin as he strokes. Some are rounded, some are arced and jagged.

"Was she injured?" he asks.

Will's movements slow, the tension in his shoulders returns. "You could say that…"

The answer is vague, clearly there is more to the story than a simple injury.

"What happened?"

Will pets her head, and Hadley makes a happy mini bark, her tail whips from side to side. Will smiles down at her, but his eyes hold a permeating sadness Hannibal knows well.

He recognises it within himself whenever he allows himself to think about Mischa. How he had loved her, how the sound of her laughter still lingers in his mind and makes him want to both laugh and cry. How much hurt had come when she had died.

"I'd been out of town, south for a trip." Will says, and Hannibal listens. "I found her behind a store front. She'd been left there tied to the dumpster. It was obvious she'd been

dumped and left for dead. I can't confirm, but I'm pretty sure she was a bait dog."

A bait dog. Hannibal knows the lingo. Will doesn't know it, but he's killed men who do this.

Dog fighting. A horrible so-called 'sport' where money exchanges hands as two dogs fight, often to the death. The bait dog is used to test another dog's fighting instinct. Many are mauled or killed in the process.

Hannibal feels an odd kinship with this beast. He still dreams about that night his parents died. Starvation and abuse by the man who did it. About Mischa. He feels mauled when he wakes, shaking and cold.

"You saved her." his own voice sounds small to him.

"It doesn't feel like it sometimes. She was all cut up and bleeding. Covered in flies who didn't even notice she wasn't dead yet. When I approached her, her tail started wagging-" He stops abruptly, looking up at the ceiling like it could stop the tears from forming.

Hannibal rarely feels the squeeze of empathy when he encounters it in the wild. He has practiced a wide range of expressions to match what is expected of him, making sure he can pull them out when needed. He finds in this moment he does not need to fake the fall of his mouth, or the softening of his eyes.

"I think that was the worst part. She'd been so hurt already by the ones who were supposed to love her, and she was still so happy to see someone." Will's voice is wet, and wavers.

Hannibal reaches out and touches him, his hand on his back as if Will too needs settling. Maybe he does, in a way.

"Her fur has grown back in, so sometimes I can forget. But every time I touch her, I can't deny what happened to her."

"We cannot deny our pasts. Only hope in our future. She is safe and loved. She knows that."

"Yeah." Will sniffs, taking Harley's face in his hands. Her face squishies at the motion, her loose jowls make her look as if she is smiling. "Yeah, you're safe here with us."

It's said so softly he almost misses it. Us. Being an us with Will shouldn't feel so good, shouldn't sate his hunger like eating, like killing.

As much as his affections for Will are growing, he shouldn't be doing this. He shouldn't be here, basking in the glow of Will's strange and glorious light.

He's getting too close to love. The last person who loved him, he consumed. He's a serial killer, one Will is looking for, with his big beautiful eyes, and his wonderful brain. He's going to find him too, if Hannibal can't stay away from him, put at least a little distance between them.

His conscious nearly tears asunder by two opposing thoughts. He shouldn't have come here today. He is so glad he came hee today.

Will's breathing steadies, he rubs the wet pearls for his eyes with the back of his hand. "Sorry. I didn't mean to get all emotional on you."

"Do not apologize for feeling, Will." Hannibal says. "I would never begrudge you of that."

Will nods, composing himself well enough to return to their task.

It doesn't take long for them to finish up, and Harley happily jumps from the tub as they drain the mucky water. They dry her off together, slotted so close Hannibal can smell his skin.

There is the familiar scent of wet dog, mixed with the sweaty, musky smell of a man after a hard day's work that the cheap drug store cologne can't quite hide. Sandalwood and pine, with a salty tang that lingers on Hannibal’s tongue.

The front of Will's shirt is soaked through in large patches, the fabric made translucent. Hannibal can see the cream of Will's skin, places he's never seen before. The climb of his ribs, a hip bone, and the dark bud of a nipple.

Temptation looms, and Hannibal has to look away, lest he gives in to desire and does something foolish. It isn't like him to not push the boundaries of what is possible, something he can't help doing now.

When Hannibal stands up, he intentionally lays a hand on Will's thigh, a pretense of needing a boost. "My knees aren't what they used to be."

"Sorry." Will says, accepting Hannibal’s offered hand to stand up. "I used to have a knee pad for this, before one of the dogs chewed it up."

"I'll be alright."

When Will opens the bathroom door, Harley prances out which turns to a trot as he makes her way down the stairs, Hannibal and Will on her heels. In the living room downstairs, she crumpled to the floor, using her back legs to propel her across the rug. She wiggles one way, then the other, attempting to further dry herself.

It's a rather endearing sight, watching her flounder about. It gives Hannibal a little more understanding of their appeal.

"We finished up quick." Will says, regarding the grandfather clock, with reads just after 6:15pm. Not for the first time, Hannibal wonders if Will exaggerated the length of took to properly clean his dogs. It matters little now.

"Indeed." He says, brushing a few hairs from his damp vest. "Shall we freshen up, then start dinner? You'll sous chef for me, yes?"

Will's smile speaks volumes. "If you'll have me."

"Of course." *I'd love to have you.*

Chapter Four

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal tucks in the hem of his white dress shirt into his black pants, making sure it lays smooth before pulling on the warm gray Cashmere Sweater over top. He has foregone a tie this time, keeping his outfit business casual.

Will doesn't have a full length mirror in his living room, but there is an elongated half mirror over the back of the piano. If he stands at his full height he can check the fit along his collar. He adjusts the shape a little, making sure they are even and straight.

When he's satisfied, he gives his reflection an approving nod.

His dark brown leather Oxford makes a displeasing and ugly match with his attire, but he'd taken them off at the door hours ago, and no one will see him when he drives home tonight.

He is thankful that he keeps a change of clothes in a travel case in the trunk of his Bentley. In his early days as a surgeon, he kept several sets in hand when he volunteered for hospital rotation across the surrounding states.

Now the bag has a dual purpose. Mishaps when interacting with the public have happened, and Hannibal doesn't want to be seen by his patients in a coffee stained suit because a rude pig couldn't be bothered to watch which way they were going. It's also important for his extracurricular activities.

Murder can be messy, and there have been times where his murder suit has failed to catch blood and viscera, and he has had to burn the affected article, and change into something else. Extra clothing is also a must in case he needs to be on the run at a moment's notice.

Having finished the final touches to his appearance, Hannibal goes to the kitchen to begin dinner. Before he joined Will in the doggy day salon Hannibal had put all the ingredients away in their respective places.

He takes the chicken from the fridge to warm to room temperature, then moves to the dining table, intent on tidying the space in preparation for dinner. With one look at the assortment of different objects makes it very clear Will has difficulty separating work from leisure.

The table has several textbooks, work folders, and student papers, some partially graded. Hannibal pushes them around, intending to sort like with like, when he finds the manilla folder marked *Huntsman Murders*.

Hannibal touches the folder, curiosity peaking, wondering what information might be hiding inside. He tilts his head towards the staircase, listening for any telltale sign that Will is approaching. When several breaths pass with no creek of steps, Hannibal flips open the folder.

Inside, the dead eyes of Amelia Baker stare back from her place of rest. The tight shot gives him a detailed view of her opened throat, the frayed edges of her Platysma muscles and just a hint of the pectoralis major and deltoid muscles underneath.

He skims the rest of the photos, finding crime scene after crime scene inside. Each murdered girl appears, crime scene photos meticulously photographed and organized. Every crime scene is accompanied by an FBI report, detailing the routines of the murdered girls, possible suspects, and their alibis.

Hannibal flips past the photos, to the FBI reports. He skims through them, skipping over the details he already knows, stopping when he finds a list of suspects. There are several names, all detailing their relationship to Amelia.

An ex boyfriend, where Amelia was the one to end it, an older manager who was more than a little creepy, Her own father, a man with severe anger management issues who kicked her out of her childhood home after she dropped out of college. There are few others, but seemingly with less connection or access.

There are testimonials from those who knew her, including several interviews. There is one from her best friend who said she was "too kind for this world". A prior coworker from the local convenience store said her bright personality and infectious smile lit up the room. He is quoted saying, "The world will be a little darker without her."

He flips to the other reports, cross-referencing similar suspects and alibis, and interviews. He returns to the first report, and smiles when he sees what he's looking for. There is a pen on the table, and Hannibal takes it in hand to underline a name.

The stairs creek, and Hannibal snaps the folder shut, depositing it back onto the table. By the time Will makes it down the stairs, Hannibal has moved back to the fridge. He pulls out each ingredient, separating them into each step for easy access as Will enters the kitchen.

Hannibal catches his form in his peripheral vision, seeing a flash of an unfamiliar color he expects from Will's wardrobe. That prospect alone has Hannibal’s pulse stutter.

"All freshened up?" Hannibal asks him, turning to inspect him, and what he finds makes him salivate.

"Hmm." Will confirms with a noise. He isn't looking at him, running his fingers through his damp curls. The action pulls them back from his handsome face, only for them to bounce back to frame the curve of his cheek bone.

Hannibal’s slip down the line of his face to the neatly trim of his beard, past the swell of his Adams Apple, to feast upon the picture of Will's alluring form.

Will has changed clothes, exchanging his beat up t-shirt for a button down, his sweatpants for dark fitted slacks. The shirt Hannibal had never seen before, deep burgundy with pearl white buttons. The top two buttons are undone, giving him just a hint of collarbone.

The collar is stiff, and there are faint fold lines still visible in the fabric dating back to its days when it was placed on the department store shelf. There is next to no stray dog hairs clinging to the surface, meaning it's been in the back of the closet until now. This is mostly likely the first time Will has worn it.

Hannibal is flattered for the time and effort that went into Will dressing up for him. The shirt isn't nearly as nice as the ones Hannibal owns, but this is probably the best Will could afford on his teacher salary.

The fit is quite good, trim where Will's waist narrows, and doesn't bunch where he has tucked it into the waistband of his dress pants. Except the seam along the shoulders, it gives Will some good lines.

"I should put you in touch with my tailor. Jonathan does excellent work."

"Does it not look okay?" Will asks, eyebrows knitting together as he runs an anxious hand down his chest to smooth the shirt.

"Not at all. It looks wonderful for an off the rack option. However department store fits do not take into account the subtle difference in arm length, body shape."

Will doesn't roll his eyes, that would be rude, but it's a near thing. "Of course you would know this is a 'department store' shirt."

Hannibal ignores the comment, instead taking this opportunity to invade Will's space, "This seam should align with your shoulder here," Hannibal says, running his finger along the edge of Will's shoulder bone socket, "Tailoring it back to meet the curve will give your shoulders a stronger look."

Will scoff, but there is a smile that plays in his mouth. "I'm not sure I can afford your tailor."

"I've been going to him for years. He will give you a discount if you mention my name." This close, Hannibal can drag Will's scent over his olfactories again. He is pleased to find the lack of Will's cheap cologne. "Other than this seam, it's a wonderful fit. The color works well with your delicate completion."

"Delicate?" Will's brow furrows. "Are you making fun of me?"

"I apologize. I only meant that this color brightens your appearance, makes you look alive and vibrant." Hannibal amends, stepping away from Will at last.

He doesn't miss the subtle way Will leans towards him, as if subconsciously he wasn't ready to part from him. He catches himself a moment later, clearing his throat behind his fist ."So…dinner?"

"Ah, yes." Hannibal smiles, endeared by Will's flushed expression. "Do you own a skillet?"

"Do I own a — Hannibal," Will clutches his heart, pretending to be more offended than actually he is. "I'm a good southern boy. Of course I own a skillet."

Hannibal's huffs a short laugh. "Of course you are. I should have known."

Will helps him find the skillet, a cutting board, and anything else necessary that the man hadn't brought with him. Hannibal seasons the chicken while Will washes all the produce thoroughly, placing them all beside the cutting board for chopping.

"If you would, cut the carrots first. Then the potatoes, while I started on the meat."

"Uh… sure." Will says, rolling up his sleeves.

Hannibal turns back to the stove, wanting to avoid his eyes lingering on the exposed skin of Will's forearms, lest he embarrass himself by burning the meat.

The pan is nice and hot now, and the chicken sizzles when he lays the meat inside. He seasons them liberally, letting the juices reduce to tenderize muscle and fat.

Behind him, Will takes up a knife and starts on the carrots.

The knife crunches through, a truly abusive sound as it hits the cutting board, making Hannibal wince. Will hardly seems to notice. Carrot slices jump from the force of the blade, rolling off the board and onto the counter as Will continues. Many of the pieces he's cut have widely different thicknesses.

The man has no technique at all.

The next cut causes a carrot slice to go rogue and jump off the counter and rolls on to the ground. One of the dogs sees it and chases after it.

"Fuck. Sorry."

"It's quite alright." Hannibal says, washes his hands, then dries them on the towel before he goes to him. "Let me show you a better technique."

Will hands him the knife and moves out of the way.

"Hold the carrot firmly, curl your fingers under like this to prevent cutting yourself." Hannibal says, demonstrating and he brings the blade down at a 45 degree angle. "When you bring the knife down, don't force it. Use the edge of the blade to cut forward. Doing so this way will give you more control."

Will makes a thoughtful sound beside him, leaning to watch him. "Oh."

Feeling the heat of his attention makes him want to impress. Hannibal rotates the carrot and makes another cut, creating a small wedge.

"There are four main methods of cutting; slices, diagonal, Julienne or matchsticks, and the roll cut. This is the roll cut technique. The even edges make them the ideal shape when roasting." Hannibal says, continuing the roll-cut-roll-cut until the whole carrot is prepared.

"Fancy." Will says, examining the perfectly cut pieces. "You really know some stuff, huh?"

Rather than answer, Hannibal offers him the knife again. "Care to give it a try?"

Will blanches. "Yeah, okay."

Hannibal makes room for Will, taking up the knife again. He chooses another carrot and makes the first cut.

"Remember, *slide* the blade. Don't force it."

"Got it."

The next slice it better.

"Tilt the blade a little more. And keep the sizes of each piece consistent."

Crunch . "Like this?"

Will is still pushing too hard.

Hannibal invades his space, closing his hand over Will's on the blade. Will stiffens under his touch, but doesn't protest as Hannibal arranges his other hand over his on the carrot.

"Slide the blade like this, using a soft pressure," the blade slides easily through the vegetable, making a perfect slice, "Then you won't have the cuts jumping away like that."

"O-oh. Yeah that…that make s-sence." Will stutters as Hannibal guides him through a few more cuts. enjoying the heat of Will's back against him.

For just a moment he imagines Will in his lap, his boy's hands fiddling with the sound of his Theremin. The music would be bad, uncontrolled and jumpy under his fingers.

Will would laugh, unrestrained and with his whole body. "Man, I suck at this."

It would be music to Hannibal's ears.

"Let me show you again." He would say, his hands enveloping Will's, guiding him through the movements, until they'd tamed it together. Until Will's bare throat is too much to resist and Hannibal had to taste him there. The skin there would be salty and warm, and Will's pulse would jump under the attention.

"Hey!" He would smile, squirming in his lap. "I thought we were making music here."

"I've got a better way to make music together." Hannibal would rumble in his ear, pulling a laughing Will down to the ground.

He's so lost in thought he nearly does it, almost leans into scent along his nape. He catches himself, but lets his eyes linger where his jugular runs.

"How are these?" the real Will asks, and Hannibal has to pull his eyes away from the patch of land on his neck down to the cutting board and the carrot they have cut together.

"Much better."

Will flushes under the praise. "I'm not going to be able to do this as fast as you."

"Nor should you. I have had years to practice."

Hannibal takes his hands away, but stays close as he lets Will select and cut on his own. He watches him work, following the steps he had walked him through.

"How am I doing?"

"Wonderful."

The pieces are not so wonderful, but they are mostly even, and he can see Will's efforts.

"Once you've finished, place them on a baking pan and we can season them."

As much as Hannibal would love to remain at Will's back, the meat must be attended to. He returns to the stove to turn the chicken over.

At his back, Will makes his way through the carrots. The abrasive *crunch* of the knife is gone, only the appropriate *chop-chop* as Will uses the technique Hannibal has shown him. When that task is finished, Will seasons them and they arrange the tray inside the oven.

"Any particular style you want the potatoes done?"

"Wedges will do."

Will doesn't need further instructions for the potatoes, and when those are done they go in the oven as well. With his job finished, Will goes to clear the table in preparation for dinner.

Will's dinnerware is less than desirable when Hannibal goes to plating. He would prefer to match the color of the plate to compliment the food, but he at least owns a matching set.

They sit down opposite of each other at Will's table. Hannibal refrains from picking up his fork, wanting to watch Will's face as he takes his first bite. The blissful expression the man makes is worth every trial Hannibal has been through today.

"You were right. This is amazing." Will says, moaning around his fork. "I forget how good of a cook you are sometimes. This is definitely better than a take away pizza."

"I'm glad to hear it." Hannibal allows himself a carefully measured smile. "I hope that means you'll join me at my table again soon."

"Sure. Next time, we can skip the doggy day salon and go straight to this."

Hannibal allows himself to laugh, and Will's answering smile is wide enough to show teeth. "To next time, then." he says when he's able, holding up his glass for Will.

"To next time." Will repeats, raising his glass to Hannibal's.

Their glasses clink together in promise.

Chapter End Notes

I really enjoyed writing them cooking together. Probably my favorite part of this fic. That, and Harley in the bath.

There will be one more chapter after this, and have finally decided how I want to tackle the ending. There will not be sex person n this one, and I'm sorry of that's disappointing to you. I am adding a second part that will explore th it intimate relationship, so stay tuned for that.

Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After dinner, Hannibal retreats to the living room while Will begins preparing his dogs' meal. Normally, he would want to linger, to watch Will's fingers squelch in the raw ground meat as he portions it out into their silver bowls. To see him cracks eggs and dollops of cooked unseasoned rice according to each dogs' need. But there are other things at play here.

It's important in the art of flirting to allow for introspection. And space is necessary to bring the energy between them to a simmer, preventing everything from boiling over too soon.

Hannibal wants to give Will the chance to swallow the affection he has given him. To cut the morsels of his attention into manageable bites, to make him hungry for the next course.

So Hannibal makes himself scarce. He turns his attention to the instrument. He bypassed the piano before but curiosity brings him back while he waits. There is sheet music, laid open on the music rack, a hymn called One Day When we all Get to Heaven. Hannibal leans in to read the scores, fingers picking at the keys gently to the tune.

Hannibal knows Will was raised in the south, famously called the Bible Belt of America. It would stand to reason that Will was brought up within Catholicism, likely led into the church pews every Sunday with his father.

They have spoken of God, especially during the cases with religious undertones, though Will has given no indication of his beliefs. Hannibal buried his own God the day Mischa died. What's left of both of them has been eaten away by time.

Hannibal hits the high cord, and he winces. The notes go flat, the stings inside having loosening over the years or inactive use. They leave a sour taste in Hannibal’s mouth as he plays.

"It needs to be tuned."

Hannibal jumps just a little when Will speaks his presence behind him. He had known he was there, watching him from the kitchen entryway. He had only wanting Will to think he was caught off guard.

Will's hands are a raw red from the thorough manner in which he has cleaned them. How beautiful they would look trapped at the wrists, pressed against the cabinets in his kitchen. He spares them only a glance, instead filing the image away for later. Back to the matter at hand.

"Shall I put you in touch with my musician as well?"

"No." Will says coming in next to him. He touches the music score with his fingertips. It's a lonely gesture, like he's remembering something painful. He closes it, resting his fingers on the stand. "I was thinking of selling it anyways."

"Then why the sheet music?"

"It's…from a long time ago."

"Did you play?"

"No. Not me." Will's eyes are far away, in another time entirely. He's thinking of someone. Someone else who isn't Hannibal.

Jealousy rises in Hannibal's throat so hard he thinks he might growl aloud. He's struck with need to lay claim over Will, mark him in a way that will show everyone that he is his and his alone. He's so lost in that possessiveness, he didn't realize Will is still talking.

"—makes me a little burdened with nostalgia sometimes."

"Did this belong to them?" There is no name, or initials on that Hannibal can identify in the few pages he has seen while playing.

"Only metaphorically." Will says. "We moved around a lot, something we've covered before in our conversations. I didn't have a lot of space to keep stuff from the Stand—Sit—Bend churches we can went to."

Hannibal blinks. "Excuse me?"

"That's just what I called it in my head as a kid. A term for traditional worship. You know?"

Hannibal shakes his head, not following.

"You stand, you sit, you get down on bended knee to pray." Will explains. Is hand waves with each command. "'Please rise for the reading of the gospel', 'all rise for the Creed', 'please kneel for the Eucharistic Prayer'." Will repeats with a particular careful practice, his voice emulating the long remembered phrases.

Though he speaks with a reverence, his eyes are hollow. Hannibal wonders if there is some religious trauma there, or if this simply comes from a place of non-belief.

"I've never heard it expressed quite like that before." Hannibal confesses, amused by the notion. "Do you ever attend mass now?"

"No." Will says, a frown appearing. "Sometimes for Christmas. Easter."

"The birth and death of Jesus."

"Jesus wasn't born in December." Will quirks a smile."Some scholars speculate he was actually born in September. It's still debated whether Christians stole the Winter Solstice from

the Pagans, or if the Pagans tried to ride the coattails of the story of Jesus's rise in popularity."

Hannibal’s mouth opens, some witty banter about the theft of religion when the whimpering bark from one of the dogs gets their attention.

"Looks like it's time for a pee break." Will says, and goes to let them out. Hannibal follows out to the porch.

"Not worried they will take another dive into the carcass?" He asks.

"It's not close to the house." Will says.

The hounds galavant about the yard, first one way, then the other. Winston is the only one who quickly finishes his business then comes to sit beside Will's legs. If Hannibal didn't know any better, he would think the dog is on to him.

Max interupts his thoughts as he circles him. Then he spits out a ball at Hannibal's feet. It's rubber and blue, covered in frothy saliva from being thoroughly mouthed. Max then sits at his feet expectantly.

"He wants you to throw it for him." Will says, as if Hannibal couldn't sumuse that himself. "He'll try to bully you into it, so don't feel obligated."

He looks back down at Max, who's mouth opens to lop his tongue out. His tail wags just a little faster, like he can see Hannibal’s consideration. Hannibal looks back up to Will, who shrugs.

Hannibal can think of worse ways to end this night. His face is controlled as he lifts the ball from the dead grass. Max wiggles his rump as he drops into the play bow position.

He doesn't have a practiced throw, but there isn't a science behind the motion. Hannibal makes sure to stretch to prevent injury as he gets ready for the wind up. He puts some power into it as he rears back and lets it fly.

Max takes off after it at full speed. Buster pursues him, barking at his hind legs. The cone on his head flops wildly as he runs. The energy level in the yard changes after that. Jack and Harley begin chasing each throw and Max has a run for his money to be the first one to it.

He isn't as fast as the bigger dogs, and more often than not ends up chasing whoever bets him to it. Buster seems more interested in chasing. Zoey tries to avoid being trampled by them as they run. Harley plays keep away whenever she catches it, dancing about as she taunts Max with it. A sound bubbles up from Hannibal's mouth without his permission, the laughter mush louder than allowed.

It's a strange situation to be here like this. Even stranger for the feeling it inspires in him.

These creatures are meaningless animals. They behave as nature and human manipulation dictates them to. They are insignificant, and in the grand scheme of things, offer very little to him. Their only purpose to him is an avenue to draw him closer to Will, nothing more. And yet...

Hannibal’s palm is uncomfortably wet after so many throws but for some reason, he can't keep himself from smiling. These hounds have ruined his suit, left all matter of substances on his skin, and he's swallowed more hair today than he has. of hi life. But despite slobber, and hairballs, and spit-slick fingers, he can't stop smiling.

He...likes these dogs. Not as much as he likes Will, but he thinks he would raise hell should someone do them an injustice. He wonders mildy if this is how often love starts. If this is what love is supposed to look like. If this is how Will loves.

He steals a glance to his left, looking for him now.

He finds him still on the porch, leaning his elbows on the railing. A grin cuts across his mouth as he watches the display Hannibal makes. When their eyes meet, Hannibal can see something working behind them.

Yes, he thinks. *See how good I look on your front lawn. See how much I belong here.*

Will's expression shifts as he looks away, and Hannibal wonders if his empathy has heard him. A pink flush graces Will's cheeks, the neckline of his shirt brightens with heat. More curiously, Will goes inside.

Hannibal wants to follow, to see what he has done to Will more closely, but Harley brings him the ball and he cannot say no to her. By the time he's thrown it for her twice, Will is back, two tumblers of amber liquid.

He nods to Hannibal. *Take your time*.

He doesn't make him wait long. Not too much later, Max becomes fed up with his game ruined by his packmates. He snatches the ball up when Harley gets distracted by a leaping grasshopper, and brings it with him under the porch steps to hide.

Hannibal pats Harley on the head as he comes the steps to join Will. He takes the glass from Will, sipping slowly to let the sharp taste curl his tongue. He doesn't tell Will how cheap the liquor is, or how right now he can't imagine drinking anything else, but Will must already know.

Will takes a drink too. They sit in silence for a few moments, the cooling air making their breaths fog.

"That person." Hannibal asks finally, unable to help himself. "Did you love them?"

Will sighs. "Not like I was supposed to."

"Love gives us a glimpse at Angels and Demons."

"Quote from Hemingway?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "Me."

Will chuckles. "People have done unholy things in the name of love, just as they have done righteous acts."

"It isn't dissimilar to what God does. Preform unspeakable evils to carry out his righteousness. After all, we are made in his image"

"Are we talking about God again?"

Hannibal’s chin dips. "If you like."

Will's fingers tighten on the porch sill. "I still struggle with the idea of God."

"Because of the evil you witness?"

"Because if he does exist, that just means he's become an absent God, ignoring the plight of man and his monsters." Will corrects.

Hannibal nods. "Then it's easier to believe there is nothing after this life for ourselves, rather then face the possibility God has abandoned us. But let me pose this question for you."

Will looks up at him, his eyes catch the light of stars burning billions of miles from earth. Temptation looms within him, so much so that, Hannibal had to look away. He choses a constilation tlto look at instead.

"Perhaps we are looking at this from the wrong side of our Earth. You know of the proposed afterlife, those golden gates of heaven, and the theology in which we make our assension or subsequent fall into hell." Hannibal tells him. "But what happens when we are in between the two? That realm between Heaven and Hell, where we wait out our judgment. Tell me, what do you think it's like there?

Will's shoulders hunch over the railing. "I only know what my catholic upbringing believed."

"We can either ascend to everlasting peace, or fall into the furry pits of eternal torrent. If Purgatory is rhe in-between, I would propose that both joy and suffering should be found in the realm between God and the damned."

Will hums. "You're saying we could be in Purgatory right now." The idea that all of humanity has all ready between heaven and hell is an interesting one.

"It's a possibility."

"One problem." Will says, mouth quirking. "Purgatory is for the souls of those who die in a state of grace and are made ready for heaven. Your thinking of Limbo."

"Ah yes, I suppose so." Hannibal smiles sheepishly. "Forgive me. English is not my first language, and on occasions, things get lost in translation."

"I find that hard to believe."

Hannibal places his empty glass on the railing. "It happens."

"Only when you want the excuse."

Will is as perseptive as ever. Those eyes of his will get him into trouble, sooner or later. Self-preservation will not stop him for seeking all of Hannibal's secrets, even the ones that could mean his destruction.

Hannibal stares down at him, his fingers so close to Will's on the railing. And Will stares back.

Someday, Hannibal will have to hurt Will. There is no question about that. It would seem he's in constant fluctuation between *kiss* or *kill. In the end,* who knows where the dice will finally fall.

Will's chin lifts, just a fraction and Hannibal rolls the dice again.

"If there is such a notion heaven and hell, where does that mean you'll end up?" Will asks him, his eyes shining in the moon light.

"I am no Gabriel, Will."

"And I am no Michael."

Hannibal kisses him, there on the porch. Will hands shake as a breath leaves him, threatening to drop his glass. Hannibal folds his hands over his, taking the tumbler. When pulls back, and shoots the remaining liquor.

"I should be going, now. Thank you for the lovely evening." He tells Will, before he descends the stairs.

"Hannibal, wait."

Hannibal stops, turns his head to appraise him.

Will is flushed, hands twisted together like he might reach for him if not anchored to something. "Are you sure you safe to drive? I mean, you could stay."

He could. He could do a lot of things. He could take Will to bed right now, make love to him under the dark glow of the moon. Will might just let him. Instead he says, "I think we should take some time apart. I want you to ruminate on my feelings for you."

Will blushes again, has ducking to hide the way he burns. He nods. "How about tomorrow?"

"That's hardly enough time." Hannibal climbs the stairs again. Will jumps, eyes doe-like in excited fear as Hannibal approaches him again. His chin tips up, expecting to be kissed again.

Hannibal doesn't, only takes his face on his hands. Will melts on contact, his knees shaking under the intensity of Hannibal’s eyes.

"I want you to understand the depths of which I ache for you." Hannibal says to him. "I crave your touch, your attention, your kindness, like a man craves water and food in his belly. If you asked me to warm your bed tonight, I would be helpless to deny you."

Will let's out a startled moan, his eyes falling shut. Hannibal wonders if Will can set them together now, in his mind. Hannibal on top of him, inside him, carving him open in all the ways he wished to know him.

Will's skin is flushed at his color, his cheeks pink. whether from the nights chill or the thoughts Hannibal has inspired in him, Hannibal doesn't know. He hopes for the latter.

"That is why I must leave, dear Will." Hannibal feels cold the moment he steps back. Will doesn't make a sound, until Hannibal is almost in his car.

"I'd let you." he says, almost a whisper. Then stronger. "I'd let you."

Hannibal pauses. "But not tonight." Is not a question.

Will bites his lip, and for a moment, Hannibal thinks he might ask him to stay anyways. "Make me dinner. Friday."

"Friday, then." Hannibal agrees. The chase is exiting when it isn't over too soon.

The drive is long and lonely. But Hannibal doesn't mind. He is still buzzing when he gets to his destination. There is a text notification on his phone. He opens it before he even gets to the front door. One is from a colleague, two are from Will.

Drive safe. Please text me when you're home.

I can't wait for Friday.

Hannibal texts back.

As am I. He types as he steps up to the house. *I am home, now. Good night, Will.*

Hannibal is not home. Not yet. There is something he has to do first. Then door opens on the third knock.

"Hello." he says to the young man,. "Am I to assume you are Felix Turner?"

"Yeah," he says slowly, confused who would be visiting at this hour. "Who wants to know?"

"I believe a friend of mine is looking for you." Hannibal says, producing a scalpel from his pocket. "And I intend to give you to him."

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end of this story! Well, not quite. I have a second one planned where Will finds the 'gift' Hannibal left him and we get to see the more intimate side of their relationship. I was hoping to start posting it in June for #BottomHannibal month, but since I started Underbelly, it probably won't be ready.

A project for another time. Thank you so much for reading, and I hope you come back for the next installment. I promise there will be dogs and sex (not together) next time!

End Notes

I had this story in my drafts, and then hit the wrong button and accidentally posted it. I hadn't met to until I was finished with my other ongoing fic, but with the damage done, I'm going to leave it up.

That being said, because I hadn't planned on posting it I don't have the rest of it finished so it might take a while for the subsequent chapters to be posted. If you enjoyed this fic, please check back when I get around to finishing this. I'll try to make time to finish chapters for this fic as well.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!